

Research without resources

ABSTRACT

The following is an account of my filmmaking practice-as-research activities during the 2020 Covid-19 UK lockdowns. After giving an outline of my research methodology and relevant theories, this essay will reflect on the obvious difficulties faced when attempting to adapt artistic practice to a situation with little access to resources or participants. I will also analyse the learning outcomes experienced from these difficulties, especially where interventions from my research took shape in unexpected ways.

KEYWORDS

Masculinity; intimacy; practice; film; performance.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

As an early-career researcher in the process of completing my PhD, I am often reminded of the developing nature of practice-as-research within the academy. Coming from a filmmaking background, I have had to contend not only with the justification of my research methods, but also the difficult task of performing this research during two national lockdowns in Scotland. For context, my current PhD project, entitled *Exploring Masculine Intimacy Through Filmmaking Practice*, aims to explore the manner in which male intimacy is performed cinematically and how the use of alternative techniques within casting, scriptwriting and working with actors can adjust representations of male characters and their expression of homosocial love between each other.

Part of my original research outline is to create a working space between director and actor which can reflect on the behavioural expectations of a patriarchal society and result in a transgressive performance of masculinity and intimacy between men. With the inability to work with actors physically during lockdown, I was challenged to continue my research without what I considered a key resource — access to other human beings.

An important text I consulted early in my research was Robin Nelson's *Practice as Research in the Arts* (2013). Attempting to clarify some of my confusion between what counts as *art* and what counts as *research*, I qualify my project as practice-as-research given that I will be using filmmaking as my “key method of inquiry” (Nelson 2013, 8). Due to the relative recency of practice-as-research as an accepted research methodology within academia, Nelson argues that several terms including *practice-as*, *practice-based*, *practice-led* and *artistic research* are often used in varying

definitions or even interchangeably depending on the institution (Nelson 2013, 10). Despite this, I am inclined toward using Julian McDougall's definition of *practice-led* research for my own project in that my use of filmmaking as a primary research method will be supported by the exegetical analysis and reflection of my work (McDougall 2019, 33).

Although a review of existing and relevant work is an important part of my project, there is an operative difference in the knowledge gained through the making of something as opposed to simply studying it (Elkins 2009, 145). My intended research methodology will be based in iterative practice and framed using an interpretivist epistemology, particularly given the "limitations of positivist approaches to social research" (Chowdhury 2014, 435). Specifically, I will be generating the new knowledge necessary to explore my research inquiry through the various processes involved in filmmaking. As my project deals with the relationship between director and actor and what sparks new and spontaneous developments resulting from this relationship, a practice-as-research methodology is appropriate for my exploration of intimacy between males and its expression in a cinematic context.

David Kolb's model for an *Experiential Learning Cycle* (1984) is a practical tool used in conjunction with my research framework (Figure 1). With reference to this structure, I will undertake the following processes during my research activities, which is cyclical and without numeric order by design:

Concrete Experience — The act of working with actors and making a film.

Reflective Observation — Reflection on both the efficacy of the work and my relationship with the actors involved.

Abstract Conceptualisation — Recording my observations and using them to inform my filmmaking methods and the research I make reference to.

Active Experimentation — Organising casting calls and auditions and engaging with relevant cinema based on my conceptualisations.

This repeatable process is an ideal fit for my practice. While I prefer to plan my research activities and I view fastidious scheduling as a must when working with participants, the nature of filmmaking (as well as lockdown-related limitations on creative practice which often require spontaneity)

mean that I can dive into this model during any of the four stages and still be able to complete the cycle. As each of my research activities has the potential to reveal new knowledge through doing (Nelson 2013), this iterative model will allow me to reflect on my findings to guide my research more effectively and in potentially new directions.

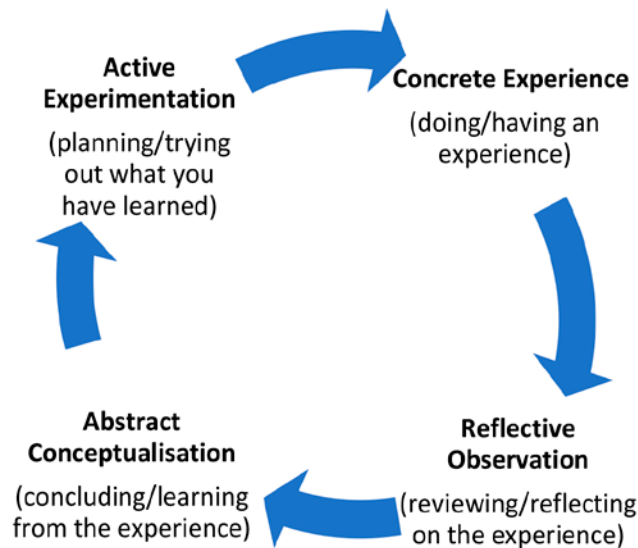


Figure 1. Kolb's Experience Learning Cycle

Similar to the rehearsal process I have applied to previous short films, I mean to employ the working methods outlined by Judith Weston in her books *Directing Actors* (1996) and *The Film Director's Intuition* (2003) during my work with actors as a part of my future research. Weston's ethos of "experience is the only teacher and empathy is the best technique" (Weston 2003, xvii) closely aligns with my goal of having a relationship of mutual respect and understanding between actor and director in order to better facilitate moments of honesty and instinctual performances. Weston emphasises avoiding result direction, such as when a director mimics an actor's line the way they want it said, in favour of actionable and goal-oriented direction allowing for the strength of a performance to come from within the actor rather than a performance which mirrors that of the director (1996).

I have identified several key filmmakers as part of an ongoing practitioner review to contextualise my own work. These include Mike Leigh and Lynne

Ramsay. These filmmakers have showcased innovative use of rehearsal techniques, working with non-actors and collaborating with acting participants to promote the development of emotionally engaging content. Keeping their relevant techniques in mind has become an important part of my cinematic toolbox as I develop my own sensibilities and techniques as a practitioner.

Mike Leigh is a prominent example of a director who employs alternative techniques when working with actors, and his interest in “working from source” (Leigh 1996, 14), or rather gathering filmmaking ideas from real-life situations and people, is a philosophical framework which is close to my own as a practitioner. Leigh aims to work with actors in an organic way which relies heavily on improvisation and employs a typically lengthy rehearsal period (Leigh 1996). As a result of challenging his actors to conjure script content based on both their own histories and improvisations with other actors, Leigh prefers not to commit to film scripts in advance, opting for a general theme or situation instead (Leigh 1996). These ideas support my own aims for a fruitful director-actor relationship in which any resulting filmic content is fuelled by uninhibited improvisations and open, candid discussion based on the actor’s understanding of the character they are playing.

I will be open to working with both professional and untrained actors, hereafter referred to as actors and non-actors, during my research. As Lynne Ramsay recalled in an interview justifying her use of non-actors in *Morvern Callar* (2002):

I’ve used professional actors before, and the combination with non-actors can be quite good. Often the actor will be more controlled and the non-professional will never do the same thing twice, which can be both exciting and infuriating. Sometimes the combination allows the actor to lose some of that control, and the non-actor will respond to someone who is more controlled. (Andrew 2002)

It is with this intention that I plan on using both actors and non-actors concurrently during my research activities. However, I will not be prescriptive about this combination and will work with varying combinations of actors with fluctuating professional experience until my results can form the most effective interplay.

RESEARCH AREAS AND KEY THEORIES

There are several key theories which are essential for understanding the lens in which this project is examining and exploring masculine intimacy. The idea of friends being in a *homosocial* relationship with each other comes from Eve Sedgwick's distinction between the desire for male bonding and *homosexual* desire (Sedgwick 2016, 1). Although men in western societies are able to express physical closeness with each other in increasingly acceptable ways, it is important to acknowledge the historical precedent of masculinity which stills influences the expression of intimacy within male friendships today (Ralph and Roberts 2009).

The idea of a patriarchal society, or the concept that many societies in the world are living under a *patriarchy*, is widely accepted terminology, though the ubiquity of its presence worldwide has been challenged (Butler 2006, 4). The definition of the term and its theoretical implications are subject to ongoing discourse. The historical, pre-industrial usage for this term has meant to describe societies where fathers rule over their family, but different kinds of patriarchies can exist in different cultures (Hennessy 2012, 420). Modern descriptions of a patriarchy have come to include the organisation of a fraternity of men over women in society rather than individual patriarchs in a family (Pateman 2015, 1). Gilligan and Snider describe the patriarchy as “a culture based on gender binary and hierarchy” (2018, 6) and suggest a framework in which the patriarchy:

1. Leads us to see human capacities as either “masculine” or “feminine” and to privilege the masculine.
2. Elevates some men over other men and all men over women.
3. Forces a split between the self and relationships so that in effect men have selves, whereas women ideally are selfless, and women have relationships, which surreptitiously serve men's needs. (2018, 6)

The second point in this framework makes a key distinction that a patriarchy is not as simple as men being superior to women in a society which is structured (intentionally or not) this way; some men can be seen as inferior to other men even when their gender allows them advantages over women. This idea is most famously championed by Raewynn Connell in *Masculinities* (2005), a text which describes this subjugation of men under

other men in a patriarchal society in the term *hegemonic masculinity*. This term, which has proven foundational for gender studies, was introduced and formalised by Connell as “a way of theorizing gendered power relations among men, and understanding the effectiveness of masculinities in the legitimation of the gender order” (2005, xviii). This concept is not meant simply as a way of categorising different masculinities which exist in society, but the relationships that exist between these different masculinities; Connell explains that these relationships “are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit” (2005, 37).

Hegemonic masculinity, much like the patriarchy that encompasses it, relies on the behaviour of its participants to reinforce its structure in a self-sustaining and ongoing cycle. This leads to the subjugation of men who do not adhere to the *heteronormative ideal* male archetype set out as the top of the pyramid in male power relations and an *ideal masculinity* which is “heterosexual, aggressive and competitive” (Connell 1997, 8). Under the umbrella of hegemony, Connell offers three different categories of masculinity to describe men who are not able to reach the masculine ideal. The first is *subordinated masculinity*, most often any man who is homosexual but extending to any man who exhibits traits “blurring with femininity” (Connell 2005, 79). The second is *complicit masculinity*, in which men who do not or are not able to practice the “hegemonic pattern”, but still stand to benefit from the power structure that hegemonic masculinity instils (Connell 2005, 79). Finally, there is *marginalized masculinity*, which Connell also calls “authorization” and serves to “refer to the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups” such as the relationship between middle class and working class masculinities (2005, 80).

Using Connell’s framework, the concept of the homosexual man being the most subordinated in a patriarchal society leads to complicit masculinities which avoid expressing homosexual or effeminate traits in order to maintain a position of power within the hegemony. Eric Anderson refers to this fear of being perceived as gay as *homohysteria* (2009). Homohysteria and *homophobia* should be clearly distinguished from each other; homophobia “is an individual’s irrational fear or hate of homosexual people” (Schuiling and Likis 2013, 186), whereas homohysteria is an individual fearing being labelled as homosexual by their society (McCormack and

Anderson 2014). Anderson's concept is closely related to the "homosexual panic" that Sedgwick outlines as leading to potentially violent responses to men having to prove they are not gay (Sedgwick 2016, 89).

Even outside the scope of cinema, the role of performance within gender has been notably explored by Judith Butler, who posits that society's notions of gender are performed "as a strategy of survival within compulsory systems" (2006, 190). Butler's theories of gender performativity align closely with Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, as both require their participants to adhere to an *ideal* version of their gender within a societal context. Role models representative of these expectations are readily found and consumed via the media (Gauntlett 2008), and research has reinforced that gender roles are mainly learned through both sociological and cultural influences (Malim and Birch 1998, 518). Prevailing societal norms can therefore both influence and be influenced by gender representations found in the media (Messner 2000). As Stephen Monteiro summates, "contemporary culture is screen culture, and it has become nearly impossible to separate our relationship with the screen from our sense of what it is to be alive" (2017, 1). This position provides a catalyst for this study to not only provide an exploration of masculinity between actor and director, but to provide alternative representations of male role models to audiences.

Within same-gender friendships, the extent of intimacy is expected to be limited so as to not encroach on the territory of homosexual love (Smith 2012); going over this line is often played for laughs in popular cinema (Ward 2015, 113). The idea of *bromance*, a recent term described by the *New Oxford American Dictionary* as "a close but non-sexual relationship between two men" (2011), has proved itself as a positive cinematic subgenre representing and influencing society's increased acceptance of men who are not afraid to express emotional and non-heteronormative behaviour around their peers (DeAngelis 2014). A large number of films within the bromance subgenre originate from the United States (Hartwell 2013) and the majority of these works are also comedy films, with notable examples including *Step Brothers* (McKay 2008), *I Love You, Man* (Hamburg 2009) and *21 Jump Street* (Lord and Miller 2012). Despite presenting seemingly progressive masculinities, these films are often limited in their challenging of heteronormative attitudes and typically fall within established social norms (Brook 2015).

In Britain, films featuring violent football hooliganism or *laddish*

behaviour are an important, often non-comedic subgenre related to bromance. These films are another cinematic representation of intimate male bonding that also express the reality of men rebelling against a changing idea of masculinity and navigating their identities in a world which increasingly emphasises female empowerment (Rehling 2011, 168). Nicola Rehling observes that “the specter of homosexuality is referenced in knowing ways, most often through homoerophobic banter” (2011, 169) in these films and connects them to “Hollywood buddy” films in this regard (2011, 169).

Both these laddish films and the bromance subgenre will be invaluable to examine and compare against my own work. When I initially proposed this PhD project, I expressed the desire to use my research to explore creating *positive* masculinities on-screen. I now believe that this research aim was misguided; the goal of this project is to use filmmaking to *explore* intimacy within male friendships, rather than to be prescriptive about which kinds of masculinity are more conducive to reaching this goal.

FILMMAKING RESEARCH AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Before lockdown was enforced, I had time to plan and execute my first filmmaking experiment. *Acting Exercise 1* featured two real-life friends and non-actors as participants. As this was my first opportunity for data collection, I took a fairly structured approach to the rehearsal. I began with a candid discussion between the participants regarding some of their opinions on friendship, intimacy and each other. I then had them come up with an improvised conversation based on events in their own life. After going over a few conversation topics, I had the participants rehearse a conversation in which they probe each other about their taste in video games, specifically *Fallout 4* (Bethesda Softworks 2015). Interestingly, their choice to identify *Fallout 4* as a foundational element of their close friendship may speak to a need to control their masculinity through typically masculine activities such as playing video games (Taylor and Voorhees 2018).

Once we had established enough content to comprise a scene, I had the participants change their physical display of intimacy every time the scene was repeated (Figure 2). This emphasis on repeating the same conversational content each time was in line with acting teacher Sanford Meisner’s method of allowing for exploration of nuance within a scene by means of constant repetition (Shirley 2010). During several of the scenes

and discussions there were jokes made by the participants of a homoerotic nature, including one comment that it might appear to spectators that we were “filming a gay porn”. This clearly reinforced the basic sentiment of homophobia as theorised by Anderson (2009). These moments usually occurred when asking the participants to engage in elevated physical affection with one another, and thus I acknowledge the need to compare their reactions and comfort levels to my future collaboration experiences working with trained actors.



Figure 2. *Acting Exercise 1*

Despite only taking place over one day, this initial exercise afforded me several important observations. I decided that, in future acting exercises, there would need to be a stronger framework for content and dialogue. Though allowing my subjects to suggest their own dialogue resulted in natural conversation, this could be limiting for actors who do not have a similar rapport and for myself as I choose to explore specific themes in my filmmaking. Another observation shared by myself and the participants was the contrived nature of being told how to behave physically with each other.

I planned for future exercises to be more exploratory and non-prescriptive in nature, while still relying on a script for structure, allowing participants to follow their own instincts and expressions.

As I set out to adjust elements of my process for the next filmmaking activity, the first Covid-19 lockdown struck. Like many researchers in my position, I was forced to radically reconsider my research and data collection activities. Contrary to the large crews, lengthy rehearsals and extensive pre-production process I had expected, I was now left with no crew members, no actors and no locations other than my single-bedroom flat. While I had originally planned to begin work on my next short film exercise in the summer of 2020, I decided to focus on writing a script for this future film and instead experiment with *myself* as a simultaneous researcher and participant in the absence of actors. The first result of this arrangement was my *Morning Routine* (Figure 3) film exercise. This was an exposing activity that forced me to consider the participant's point of view while trying to direct myself at the same time. Similar to *Acting Exercise 1*, the process of making *Morning Routine* created arguably more knowledge for me as a researcher making it than the process of watching it as an audience member would (Elkins 2009).



Figure 3. *Morning Routine*

The original impetus for this idea came from what I am sure has become a typical lockdown activity — dying your hair a new colour because because no one else can see the results. My first attempt at dying my hair blonde led to it becoming an undesirable shade of orange. Upon confiding my frustrations with this outcome to my partner she explained that, from her perspective, I was only getting a taste of the sort of expectations and pressures many women set for themselves when maintaining a desirable appearance in society.

This gave me a lot to consider, especially when examining the relationship between my own appearance and *performance* of gender and my research aims. *Morning Routine* is essentially a filmic reflection of this line of thought, finishing with the query “*am I a hypocrite for trying to fit into this conventional mould of masculinity while encouraging others to break free from such constraints?*” This reflection is heard as a voiceover while I get ready for my day after a shower — parting my hair to the left so as to appear conventionally masculine (Frimer 2019), only applying light deodorant, moisturiser and foundation before I am ready to go. My decision to expose myself in this relatively revealing fashion serves two purposes. Firstly, it compares my daily routine with what my female partner has described to me as hers in a concrete way and furthers my reflection on the differences in experience for men and women. Secondly, as I will be asking my collaborators to reveal potentially intimate and personal aspects of themselves on-screen, I wanted them to know that this is something I am willing to participate in myself.

I was pleased to be able to make something that I felt had taken me outside of my comfort zone as both a filmmaker and researcher. Using one long take was both less distracting for me as an actor while also creating more pressure to get things right. The absence of any crew also had a positive effect on my ability to be comfortable with my performance. Although the film’s content did not touch on the theme of intimacy, I felt that it was still a worthwhile exercise and that continuing to explore masculinity in this way would be a productive use of my time in lockdown. My PhD supervisors expressed positive feedback, though they felt that the relationship between the audio and the visual could have been further complicated and that there was the possibility that *Morning Routine* was essentially saying the same thing twice.



Figure 4.
Makeup Experiment

Taking on board this feedback, in my next film I experimented with going through a makeup routine for the first time. One key difference in this project was my decision to include multiple shots during the filming process, necessitating the use of editing. Another was the way the voiceover was constructed; while the voiceover for *Morning Routine* was written and edited before recording, I recorded the voiceover for *Makeup Experiment* (Figure 4) while editing and as a stream of consciousness rather than a written piece first. The result was less regurgitation of existing reflection and more emotionally involving for both myself and hopefully potential viewers as well.

This film was an attempt to introduce cinematic elements such as multiple shots and to further deconstruct my own image of masculinity. *Makeup Experiment* serves as a direct response to the realisation from making my previous film that I still actively adhere to heteronormative ideas of masculinity while researching representations that do not fall within that expectation. Though the process of having my makeup applied was unfamiliar and occasionally physically uncomfortable, I conclude in the film that I do not personally feel that its application is emasculating. Indeed, the point of this exercise was not to undergo a drag-style transformation, but rather to add makeup without attempting to hide traditionally masculine features. However, this made the validity of continuing to film my exercises in a safe space apparent; I am not sure I would feel as comfortable walking in public wearing makeup as I did next to my partner in my own home.

Although the goal of *Makeup Experiment* was not to suggest that makeup is inherently feminising, I felt that an interesting counterpoint for this film would be to have my female partner, Mollie, dress in traditionally masculine clothing and ask her questions about any potential changes in identity she experienced. *Gender with Mollie* (Figure 5) was as much a response *Makeup Experiment* as it was a pragmatic consideration, since my partner was the only other participant I had in-person access to during lockdown. This process also forced me to challenge my ethical position and research methodology, as up until this point I had only considered using male participants due to the nature of my research inquiry, never mind collaborating with someone who I shared an emotional history with.

Despite this deviation from intended practice, I would argue that in some ways *Gender with Mollie* is an effective artefact of practice-as-research. It created useful knowledge as a practitioner making it as well as expressing potential for reflection as a researcher engaging with it or audience members watching it. Mollie's thoughts and reflections of living in a patriarchal society which imparts unfair expectations on women provides necessary context for my work researching the patriarchy's effects on men. However, because she frames this discussion through the hypothetical implication that she is now a man, interventions concerning the power of male imagery, the treatment of women as property and the potential that comes from dismantling patriarchal structures emerges.



Figure 5.
Gender with Mollie

Collaborating with my partner on this film forced me to consider how to ethically construct the edit, as well as what my future relationship with practitioners could look like. In wanting to create maximum agency for my participant in this film, I edited out as little of Mollie's words as possible and left her answers in the exact order as they were stated. I was also conscious of wanting to remove my own male voice from this film so as to give Mollie's new masculine persona maximum impact. Thus, I removed all instances of my voice from the audio track of the film and replaced them with black cards with white text representing my questions. The resulting film is potentially overlong, but emotionally powerful and constructed from a position of respect and empathy toward my collaborator.

This project reminded me of the important role participants would play in my future research activities. While I was pleased with the results of this film, I also became increasingly aware of my *original research intention* of making narrative, fictional films featuring multiple participants in order to explore themes of intimacy between men. I therefore decided that, lockdown or not, I would reach out to local actors and attempt to film a sequence between them on a video call. I also decided to write a script in advance of this exercise, remembering what I had learned from making *Acting Exercise 1*. In *Remote Filming Exercise* (Figure 6), I set up the scenario of two friends

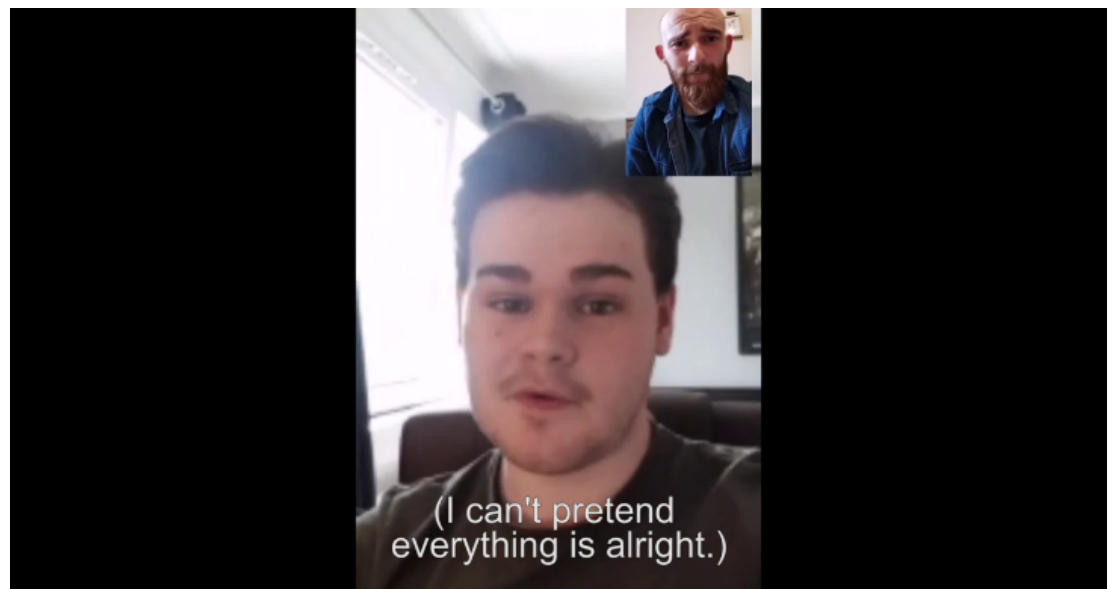


Figure 6. *Remote Acting Exercise*

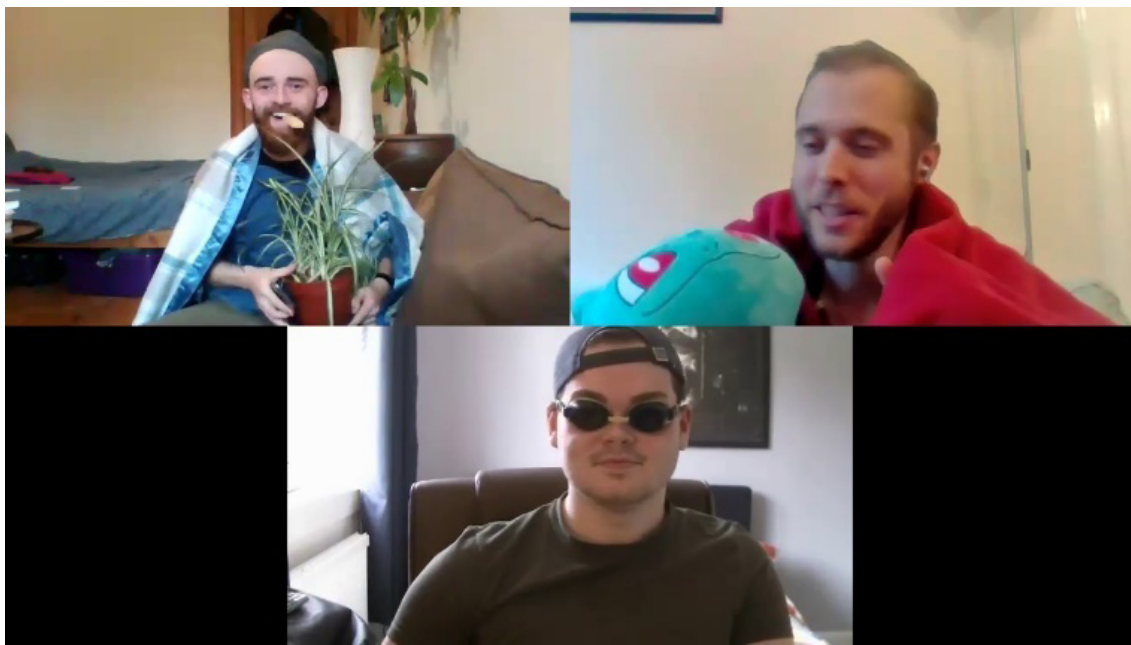


Figure 7. *Rehearsal for Remote Acting Exercise*

having a beer over video chat. One friend is desperate to see the other physically due to loneliness, while the other is adamant that he does not feel comfortable breaking lockdown rules in order to do this. The filmic complication to this setup is the addition of subtext-revealing subtitles that are presented parallel to the characters' spoken dialogue. In one example of these subtitles, a character is asked how he is doing by his friend to which he verbally replies "Yeah, not bad man, gettin' a bit sick of this shit though" while the subtitles read "(I can't pretend everything is alright.)".

Though I feel the resulting film is effective in its display of male homosocial longing, the hour-long rehearsal the two actors and I participated in prior to filming is arguably a better display of natural masculine intimacy. We enjoyed laughing together (such as when one of the actors suggested we do a "funny outfits" version of the scene) and revealed genuine concerns to each other about our mental health during lockdown (Figure 7). The balance between scripted performance and improvisation to facilitate moments like these worked well in this instance and reinforces the validity of my chosen framework and expectations for future exercises.

Despite the positive results of this exercise, the film's editing process was plagued by technical problems, including an issue where the audio had to be synced manually from my Zoom recording of the performances to the

individual phone recordings of my actors during the scene. I also felt that placing the burden of my actors being their own camera operators was unfair and could possibly have caused a negative impact on their performances. Feeling frustrated by the limitations of digital communication, I decided to return one final time to making films by myself in an attempt to regain the technical control I desired.

This time, I followed an impulse after one of my supervisors began comparing my own acting work exploring different parts of my masculinity to Cindy Sherman's work in *Untitled Film Stills* (2003). Reflecting on her work several years later, Sherman observed that the various characters she portrayed in her photographs were a way of "questioning something — perhaps being forced into a certain role" (2003, 9) and that they were the result of her "wrestling with some sort of turmoil of (her) own about understanding women" (2003, 9). I was inspired by this comparison and endeavoured to have my next film feature multiple versions of myself on screen at the same time in order to explore different facets of myself. This led to me exploring how undertaking certain tasks and actions reinforced my idea of masculinity. The result was *Masculine Affirmation* (Figure 8).



Figure 8.
Masculine Affirmation

It was enjoyable getting to participate in this *playful* exercise and to be both critical and personal about the different pluralities of masculinity that I adhere to, especially those which could be considered in conflict with one another. At the same time, there was technical rigour I had to adhere to in

making this film, especially when it came to layering different performances of myself on top of each other in the manner of the Winklevoss twins in David Fincher's *The Social Network* (2010).

This exercise was ultimately rewarding in the way I was able to further challenge my ideas of male identity, but upon reflection it became clear that once again I had focused too heavily on exploring masculinity and gender norms rather than masculine *intimacy*. The research practice of collaborating with my participants, especially actors in a rehearsal scenario, aligned with and reinforced my intended areas of study in a stronger way than the research practice of making films on my own. With the UK lockdown restrictions being eased in the near future, the increased opportunities to work with participants both remotely and in-person comes at a time when I am more certain than ever of the importance of collaboration in my research. Indeed, my very notion of intimacy has been challenged to represent more than simply physical touch, but rather the longing for homosocial bonds that Sedgwick theorises (2016) and which the use of participants is conducive to.

The knowledge gained through my filmmaking experiences during lockdown will continue to be expanded upon and integrated into my future practice-as-research activities. Specifically, I will continue to reflect on my willingness to be exposed and participate in a meaningful way with my collaborators and the ethical position of giving maximum agency to my participants so that their performances may be accurate reflections of any intimacy they have been able to experience throughout our rehearsal process or resulting cinematic output.

In conclusion, despite having *nothing* in the way of what I considered essential resources for my practice during lockdown, I was able to work creatively to make sure that my time *alone* was not only spent productively but challenged me in ways that would not be possible outside of this pandemic. While I feel that I have made great progress in clarifying the aims of my study and adjusting my methods as a practitioner, the outcomes of my research continue to remind me that more data collection activities are needed before I can confidently settle on the methods I will use for my final practice-as-research output: a feature-length film. Although the future of research in this country is uncertain due to the pandemic, I have proven to myself that meaningful research activities and literature engagement can continue to take place outside of a traditional university setting.

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